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Internet: New high-tech advertising venue

Fax ads, tied to E-mail, go worldwide instantly

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By ALICE A. LOVE

The Washington market will be among the first in which advertisers can test a new electronic medium's ability to reach consumers: the Internet.

A downtown non-profit organization called Internet Multicasting Service has found a way for users of the spreading, amorphous computer network that links universities, corporations and individuals everywhere, to send hard copy messages around the world — by fax — for the distance-neutral price of an electronic mail message.

The Internet is an information highway that allows people to use inexpensive E-mail — normally used for sending

messages within an organization's closed computer system — for long-distance communications. With the Internet tied to a free faxing service, sending hard copy messages half-way around the world would be almost as cheap as sending an E-mail message to the other end of your office.

The cost difference between using such a service, and faxing a message long-distance by phone yourself, will be subsidized by a web of carriers who have an interest in seeing such communication fostered in a given calling universe.

For UUNET Technologies of Falls Church, whose business is helping people get wired into the Internet, that inter-

est is commercial. The \$6.5-million company plans to pay for its "FaxServer" service — and hopefully make a profit — by selling as advertising space the bottom third of fax cover sheets.

"We'll field (E-mail) messages from anywhere in the world, print them out, and fax physical copies anywhere in the metro area," said UUNET spokesperson Donnalyn Frey.

Three national advertisers — Prentiss Hall Inc., O'Reilly & Associates, and Computer Literacy bookshops have already put up at least \$1,000 each.

"It gives us a chance to do very targeted advertising," said Tim O'Reilly, president of California-based O'Reilly & Associates, which runs a computerized magazine on the Internet, and pub-

lishes books on how to use the global network. "Whenever somebody sends a fax, an acknowledgement message (with an advertising plug) goes to the sender. You know that person is on the Internet, and it's likely the receiver is also on the Internet, or will be intrigued."

UUNET's offer to advertisers of access to Internet users is among the very first. Although the Internet has more than 5 million electronic mail users in 50 countries, and has a traffic growth rate of 15 percent a month, creative ways of reaching them are only just being developed.

For the time being, O'Reilly and the other advertisers have established general debit accounts with UUNET. The local computer services company will rotate their ads and deduct 10 cents from each advertiser's account whenever their commercial message is used.

In the future, ad buys on FaxServer could be targeted by local calling exchanges, said Carl Malamud, president of the Internet Multicasting Service, which is organizing the worldwide brigade of Internet-fed fax distributors.

So far, Malamud has signed up 12 volunteer organizations, including NASA, the University of Michigan and The Australian Academic Research Network, who are willing to fax messages they receive via the Internet free to anyone within their organizations.

Only UUNET is trying to launch an advertiser-supported, for-profit service.

"We're just trying to push the envelope," said UUNET's Frey.